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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (09/18): Normalization will not proceed without first resolving the settlements issue.

Main Stories:

-----Palestinian dailies continue reports on the visit of Special Envoy George Mitchell. Al-Ayyam reports that in Sen. Mitchell's meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Sen. Mitchell attempted to convince him to halt settlement activities, and that "the destiny of the US envoy's mission [was] decided today." Included in Al-Ayyam's front page is the headline "Arabs and Europeans support the position of the Palestinian leaders." Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that Mitchell urged all parties to take on their responsibilities, and that Netanyahu has hopes that Obama will retreat from his position towards settlement activities. Al-Hayat's front page highlights Mitchell's warning against Israel's continued settlement activity, calling for a halt. Al-Quds reports that during Sen. Mitchell's visit to Egypt, both the U.S. and Egypt confirmed their commitment towards the two-state solution.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Quds report on a newly discovered tunnel-network under Silwan, an Arab neighborhood of Jerusalem. Reports warn of the seriousness of continued tunneling activities, in light of speculations that an earthquake will hit Jerusalem and may cause a total collapse of the areas in and around the tunnels. According to Al-Ayyam, the network of tunnels is 600 Meters long, and extends as far as the Dung Gate "Bab Al-Maghariba" and Al-Buraq site (Wailing wall site). Al-Quds reports that tunnels have also been discovered under Al-Ain Mosque in Silwan.

All three dailies report on closures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (by the Israeli government), scheduled to end on Sunday evening (September 20). These closures were ordered as a result of the holiday for the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah). According to spokespersons for the Israeli Defense Forces, these closures will affect the entry of all citizens from the West Bank and Gaza into

Israel, except for "urgent humanitarian cases," and will not apply to representatives of diplomatic missions. According to an IDF spokesperson, men older than fifty years old and women older than 45 years old will be permitted to visit Al-Aqsa on the last Friday of Ramadan (September 18).

In economic news, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida report on warnings made by the World Bank, of fragile economic growth in the Palestinian territories. According to Al-Ayyam, however, there is also praise from the World Bank, concerning progress of civil institutions-building by the Palestinian Authority. In regards to reports that the Israeli government plans to remove one-hundred dust barriers in the West Bank, the World Bank is reported to have stated that talks about barrier removals are just "analgesic" measures, in light of the conflict over continued settlement activities.

 Hamas Media Stories:

Felasteen Daily's front page reports on Israel's total closure of the West Bank. Also part of its front-page coverage is the story of a Palestinian woman sexually harassed in an Israeli prison. Reports also discuss the recently discovered tunnel-network in Jerusalem's Arab neighborhood of Silwan. The papers also reports on reservations expressed by Hamas regarding Egypt's "reconciliation paper"; according to Hamas leader Ismael Radwan, Abbas and Fateh are not interested in dialogue.

The homepage of the Palestinian Information Center website quotes Hamas' description of events leading to the capture of Hamas leaders

JERUSALEM 00001703 002 OF 002

in the West Bank (capturing of Hamas leaders) an
"American-Zionist-Fateh attack to destroy Hamas."

 BLOCK QUOTES:

Al-Quds, "Israel will bear the Consequences of the Failure of Mitchell's Mission" (09/18): "Israel and its Prime Minister will bear the dangerous consequences and implications, Arabic and Islamic, of the failure of Mitchell's mission. All possibilities of "normalization" will fade even before they start, if Netanyahu insists on refusing to freeze settlement activities, and (continues) challenging the US administration... This will elicit an adverse reaction from the Gulf Countries, forcing them to move closer to an alignment with the Iranians... They will not trust the seriousness of the US administration and Washington's capability to execute its policies -- especially considering that demanding a halt to settlement activities is a small demand in relation to ending the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, for instance.

Hafez Al-Barghouthi, Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, "A Positive Step" (09/18): "Obama's recent decision regarding the Missile Defense Shield is the closest way to end the tension with Russia and open a new page in international relations. And now what's left is for Obama to show the same seriousness in dealing with the settlement issue in Israel - an issue that is affecting Obama's project for open dialogue. And now Israel is perhaps jumping into Obama's lap -- to protect them from the consequences of the UN report on the war crimes in Gaza."

RUBINSTEIN